

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

BRIAN SCHWEITZER
GOVERNOR



EXHIBIT 4
DATE 1/16/07
HB 179

JOHN BOHLINGER
LT. GOVERNOR

Room 102

TESTIMONY HB 179

17 January 2007

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, my name is John Bohlinger and I am Montana's Lt. Governor. I stand before you today to express the full support of our Administration for the creation of a Montana Military Family Relief Fund.

To be fair: the idea for a relief fund is not a new idea. In recent years, over twenty states have created some type of Military Family Relief Fund. The Governor and I firmly believe that Montana should join these states in adopting this proven support program, and we urge the creation a family relief fund for our national guard in Montana law.

When a member of the Montana National Guard is activated for extended periods of time for federal service their entire family shares the call to duty. This relief fund will support Montana National Guard families as they make the adjustment to mom or dad going overseas.

As the sponsor stated, House Bill 179 would create three different types of assistance grants for members of the Montana National Guard who are called to active federal contingency service.

As requested by the Governor, House Bill 179 provides an appropriation of \$1,000,000 to serve as seed money for the fund. The legislation also authorizes the creation of a new income tax check-off box to allow every Montana taxpayer the opportunity to show their support for the men and women who serve our state and country in the National Guard. The Budget Office calculates that the seed money

and income tax check off will provide for fund solvency into the foreseeable future.

I believe we can all agree that the role of the National Guard within America's Armed Forces has fundamentally changed over the course of the past five years. While the definition of the states' militia has evolved with our country, the mission was always domestic.

The Yellowstone fires of 1988, the flood of the Flathead Valley in 1964, the earthquake that dammed the Madison in 1959; or the Prison Riot of the same year—these were the domestic emergencies that were the Montana National Guard's call to duty.

The days of a solely domestic mission are no longer. Today over 40 percent of America's mobilized personnel forces in Iraq and Afghanistan are members of the National Guard. As a result, federal activations are occurring with greater frequency for a longer duration.

The increases in frequency and duration of federal activation for the National Guard have had tremendous impacts across Montana and our Country. And nowhere have these impacts been felt more than in National Guard families.

These grants are one way for the State of Montana to tell the spouses and children of the National Guard that we recognize and respect the adjustments and sacrifices their families have made in recent years.

As the elected leaders of the State of Montana, we do not have the authority to bring our loved ones home to Montana. The Constitution has vested that power within the Office of the President and the Halls of Congress.

What we can do is pray to God for their safety, advocate for their return, and provide assistance to their families. HB 179 is one of the many ways we can provide this assistance.

In closing, I would to thank the committee for their time and Representative French for her leadership and willingness to sponsor this legislation on behalf the Governor and Montana's National Guard families.